New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1950

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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN · NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
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"Peep Show"

The New York Times

June 29, 1950

Mike Todd's 'Peep Show,' Old-Fashioned Carnival, Is Presented at the Winter Garden

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Being full of solicitude for the tired business man, Mike Todd has put together an old-fashioned girlie-girlie carnival, "Peep Show," which opened at the Winter Garden last evening. "Girls Still Are Girls," Linda Bishop sings in one of those coy but hackneyed introductory acts, and the chorus delivers the punch-line: "Girlie, girlie, hip hoo-ray."

Hassard Short has staged Mr. Todd's expensive honky-tonk with Broadway splendor, and Irene Sharaff has dressed it handsomely. Howard Bay has designed some gilt-edged scenery where the girls can dance their show-shop dreams away.

Since Bobby Clark is unable to appear in it personally he has staged the comedy numbers for some of the best of the old burlesque pantaloon comics—Red Marshall, Bozo Snyder, Hi Wilberforce Conley and Peanuts Mann. Not a man who lacks culture, Mr. Todd has also staged a competent blues song composed out of office hours by the King of Thailand.

* * *

There is a lot of good stuff in "Peep Show," especially when Peanuts Mann beats a bass drum like a maniac. Hi Wilberforce Conley applies for a job in a carnival and the Peiro Brothers juggle hats, sticks, Indian clubs and anything loose on the stage in a masterly sketch about Mexico. But Mr. Todd, never noticeable for his reticence, throws sex at the customers like a schoolboy who has run away from home and just discovered sin in the big city. By the time "Peep Show" got around to its gaudy finale, your correspondent began to suspect that sex is not only a snare but an illusion, and that it is not a thoroughly satisfactory substitute for originality.

* * *

Some years ago our city fathers in their wisdom banned burlesque from this chaste community. Now they will have to decide whether burlesque at $7.20 is more lawful than burlesque at popular prices. For Mr. Todd has exuberantly thrown in all the old hokum—the grinds, bumps and strip-teases which used to put the license commissioner on his mettle. Mr. Todd's young ladies are beautifully designed and they wear well-ventilated costumes. But Mr. Todd never gets them very far from the midway. Despite its splendor, "Peep Show" is pure corn and runs into some heavy-going in the second half of the evening.

Even the buffoons have some tough going here and there. They are all real professionals. They can squirt water into a hat, slap each other in the puss with a brushful of paste and perform many heroic antics out of sound training. Conspiring with Bobby Clark in the director's box and a regiment of scribblers, they have put together two or three guffawing sketches. But even the comedians, who are the only real actors on the stage, seem a little heartier than funny, as if the necessary material were not there. "Peep Show" needs a touch of Robert the Roué from Reading, P. A., who is the master of the craft. Six excellent working comedians are still no substitute for Oom Bobby.

* * *

Out of deference for the King of Thailand, Mr. Todd concludes the first act with a cultured and gorgeous dance number to illustrate "Blue Night." There may be some quadruple entendres in "Peep Show" but there is no lèse-majesté. The King's song is okay. "You've Never Been Loved," by a couple of able commoners, Sammy Stept and Dan Shapiro, is a good song. The best is "Stay With the Happy People," composed by Jule Styne with words by Bob Hilliard.

In fact, there are a number of enjoyable items distributed throughout the evening. But they are isolated in the long parade of a girlie-girlie show. Mr. Todd has made a valiant attempt to recapture the past and be a boy again. But the formula is an old one and gets stupefying before it is worked out. Maybe sex has blown over.

"PEEP SHOW"

Revue with music and lyrics by Bhumibol (King of Thailand), Prince Chakrband, Sammy Fain, Herb Magidson, Harold J. Rome, Raymond Scott, Sammy Stept, Dan Shapiro, Jule Styne and Bob Hilliard; sketches by Bobby Clark, H. I. Phillips, William Roos and Billy K. Wells; staged by Hassard Short; dances by James Starbuck; scenery by Howard Bay; costumes by Irene Sharaff; orchestrations by Ken Hopkins and Irwin Kostel; orchestra conducted by Clay Warnick; presented by Michael Todd at the Winter Garden Theatre, June 28, 1950, with a cast including the following: Lina Romay, Bozo Snyder, Peanuts Mann, Clifford Guest, Lilly Christine, Myrtill & Pacaud, Dick "Gabby" Dana, Red Marshall, Christine & Moll, June Allen, Piero Brothers, Corrine & Tito Valdez, Spike Hamilton, Linda Bishop, Hi Wilberforce Conley, Shannon Dean.

Editor's Note:

Strike conditions at the NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM & SUN plant have prevented publication of that newspaper.

Daily Mirror

June 29, 1950

Michael Todd Offers Peep At Girls, Fun—and Girls

By ROBERT COLEMAN

"Michael Todd's Peep Show," which arrived at the Winter Garden last evening, is just what the doctor ordered for the tired businessman. It's a big, beautiful, breezy and brash extravaganza. It's packed with rowdy fun, novelties and girls, girls, girls.

There are short girls, tall girls, middle-sized girls, blonde, brunette and red-headed girls. Lovelies, all. A real package of eye tonic. And you see plenty of them in their revealing Irene Sharaff costumes. Of course, the Howard Bay sets are nice, too, but the average customer is going to be more interested in what fills those Sharaff designs.

Hassard Short staged and lighted the revue for Mahatma Todd, and your old pal, Bobby Clark, directed the sketches. Other contributors to the fast and furious frolic are James Starbuck, H. I. Phillips, William Roos, Billy K. Wells, Jule Styne, Bob Hilliard, Sammy Fain, Herb Magidson, Raymond Scott, Harold Rome, Sammy Stept, Dan Shapiro and Bhumibol & Chakraband.

The most talked-about song in the show will be "Blue Night," because its composer, Bhumibol, happens to be the young King of Siam, and its lyricist, Chakraband, a big shot at His Majesty's court. But the number you'll be hearing a lot on the radio or in your favorite bistro is "Stay With the Happy People," by Hilliard and Styne.

Director Clark, a distinguished alumnus of good old burlesque—if you'll pardon the expression—has assembled an array of amiable and able slapstick artists to put zing in the sketches.

Lina Romay, a pretty and peppy songstress, should provide a popular advocate for the catchier tunes. She learned how to make friends and influence people through her diplomat papa, a Mexican consul in the U. S.

The Peiro Brothers, from the Argentine, are amusing and amazing jugglers. Guest and his dummy, Lester, are England's answer to our own Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy.

A word of advice: when you see "Michael Todd's Peep Show," leave the children at home. It boasts too many bare facts for the small fry to appreciate fully. Todd has another smash hit on his hands, and the ticket brokers are going to be hard hit to dig up enough tickets for it. You'd better buy yours early if you expect to see it soon.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

June 29, 1950

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Nudity

MICHAEL TODD has assailed the dog days of the theater with "Peep Show," at the Winter Garden. It is a curious melange that he has put together with the help of Hassard Short and some one curiously known as Mr. Robert Edwin Clark, Esq. In essence the new musical which is bridging seasons is an attempt to recapture the gala days of burlesque on a plane where there can be no objections to off-color skits and off-clothes girls. There are some wonderful numbers in the show, particularly when such great comedians of the past as "Bozo" Snyder, "Hi Wilberforce" Conley and "Peanuts" Mann are clowning on their own. On the whole there is more nudity than entertainment.

* * *

Mr. Robert Edwin Clark, Esq. seems to have forgotten that the chief virtue of a lowly dramatic form was the slight suspense that one had in watching a leisurely strip act take place, or a couple of clowns hitting each other over the head with anything that came at hand. He has paraded a group of very well proportioned young women with very little to hide their charms. He has had Bobby Clark, H. I. Phillips, William Roos and Billy K. Wells concoct some of the oldest skits that have been seen hereabouts since burlesque was outlawed and he has thrown a couple of topical travesties into the production. Handsome as it may be, "Peep Show" is a generally trying exhibit.

* * *

The high points of the piece are a couple of Harold Rome numbers which remind one that burlesque was the training ground for eminent funny men of our day. "Pocketful of Dreams" is a sheer delight, as veterans of the wheel do a soft shuffle with sarcastic overtones. "Gimme the Shimmy" has trenchant travesty as well as a pleasant recollection of the days when a wiggling torso was considered beyond the pale. Unfortunately the scenes have little continuity and certainly do not herald a quick return of burlesque to Manhattan.

* * *

Lina Romay has the leading role in the offering, playing bits, singing and dancing with pleasant assurance. She has far too little material to support her initial appearance in town. There is a rather amusing take-off on T. S. Eliot's "The Cocktail Party," for which no one has taken credit, and Herb Magidson and Sammy Fain have written a song, violin and dance number called "Violins From Nowhere," which fits the Howard Bay settings, the Irene Sharaff costumes and James Starbuck's choreography. When a couple of jugglers and a ventriloquist are called on for assistance, "Peep Show" is no more than a mediocre night club show. The Hassard Short staging is just what you might have expected it to have been. Todd has a hot-weather show at the Winter Garden in which the chorus girls are not going to suffer from costumes, but it is tedious.

DAILY NEWS

June 29, 1950

Mike Todd Stages Stag Smoker, 'Peep Show,' at Winter Garden

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"Peep Show," presented at the Winter Garden last evening by Michael Todd, the Rajah of Razzmatazz, is a gaudy, bawdy stag smoker. Dames, Prince Mike has been heard to say — people want dames. And after several years of practically nothing but art, the music-show business could do with an old-fashioned girl show and some real lowdown comedy.

Well, the dames are at the Winter Garden, and so is the lowdown comedy. The dames are so numerous I couldn't count them even when I counted their legs and divided by two, and every one of them has more appeal than a charity campaign letter. The comedy ranges from the unfunny to what is to me hilarious. I still think it is wonderful to see a gent squirt a siphon of seltzer into another man's trousers or to see somebody sloshing wallpaper paste all over the stage and its other occupants. Sight gags, they call these events in the trade—and I'm a pushover for a sight gag.

Mr. Todd, the cynic, may be right in believing that what the showgoer needs right now is dames. He seems to think the entire public is sex starved, and being an amiable fellow he wants to help out his fellow man. But, as I watched "Peep Show" last evening, I got a weird and macabre feeling that Mr. Todd himself doesn't LIKE dames. He just likes parts of them. If he ever goes to market to buy the home dinner, I am sure he would not buy a whole chicken. He would go to one of those parts stores and lay in a supply of second joints and breasts. And he seems so fond of navels that he would go quite off his rocker in an orange grove.

Lovely Sets and Gowns.

There are some lovely scenes in "Peep Show," for Howard Bay has done the settings lavishly and Irene Sharaff has run up some beautiful costumes for the dames. But again I don't think Mr. Todd likes women's clothing—the gowns and hats and headdresses that occasionally make his dames look fetching. He just likes parts of clothing—mesh stockings, net brassieres and G strings, mostly.

The parts of "Peep Show" I like best are not the parts of dames and costumes. There are two admirable jugglers, the Peiro brothers, from Argentina. There is an Australian ventriloquist, Clifford Guest, who is uncommonly artful. There is a grand sketch in which T. S. Eliot's "The Cocktail Party" is being played while paperhangers are redecorating the room—a rough and lowdown time. There are two songs by Harold Rome which have wit and style—"Pocketful of Dreams" and "I Hate a Parade."

On the theory that many of our greatest comedians have come from burlesque, Mr. Todd's comedy is in burlesque style. I think he forgets that the great comedians got OUT of burlesque before they became great. The comedians of "Peep Show" are amiable old vaudevillians and burlesquers and they work hard. They are funny when they are squirting seltzer or pouring liquor into an ear and letting it spout from the mouth. They include Bozo Snyder, Hi Wilberforce Conley, Peanuts Mann, Red Marshall, Spike Hamilton and Dick Gabby Dana.

Every Little Movement.

Among the dames with specialties is Lina Romay, who sings pretty well and undulates nicely. Another, Lilly Christine, seems to be able to revolve in all sections at the same time. I did not find her very entertaining, but thought she might be handy in the kitchen as an all-purpose mixing machine whose adjustable speeds and movements could whip up anything from mayonnaise and hot-cake batter to ice cream.

Another dame, whose like hasn't been around in public since the late Mayor LaGuardia went on a fine rampage, has a couple of tassels hanging from her upstairs porch and can make these revolve in opposite directions. I thought I heard the good Fiorello sizzling and sputtering last night, but it must have been my imagination.

The first act finale is a beautifully set and costumed number built around a song, "Blue Night," written by the King of Siam. Pretty good song, too. The dames were in Siamese costumes—Babes in Thailand, of course. And the second act finale is a really spectacular novelty—all of the dames on a ramp being literally inundated by great, shiny soap bubbles. A belated effort to clean up the show.

The cynical Mr. Todd may be right and the Winter Garden may be the place for fun and frolic. But too frequently I was ill at ease because I had a lady with me.

New York Post
HOME NEWS
June 29, 1950

Some Tall Girls and Low Comics
By Richard Watts Jr.

The elaborate new summer revue known forthrightly as "Michael Todd's Peep Show" arrived at the Winter Garden last night, where the assembled first-nighters temporarily put away thoughts of a possible war in the East and concentrated on such other basic topics as beautiful, bare showgirls and low, rowdy comedians. Let it be said at once that Mr. Todd has kept faith with his audience. The girls are not only remarkably beautiful but far from overclad, and the comedians belong fervently to the hearty, primitive school of old-fashioned burlesque.

Since tall showgirls and low comics are always welcome in the theatre, there is much to be said for this "Peep Show" as popular entertainment for a troubled time. It is my impression, though, that, on the present occasion, the ladies carry out their duties more effectively than the gentlemen. I think there is no doubt that the chorus Mr. Todd has assembled is the handsomest that has been gathered together in many seasons, and the girls are certainly given a chance to display themselves. The comics, on the other hand, have their ins and outs.

The Clowns

There had been a persistent rumor that the great Bobby Clark, who has staged the sketches under the grimly dignified name of Robert Edwin Clark, would decide at the last moment to get into the act. Instead, various alumni of burlesque known academically as Peanuts Mann, Hi Wilberforce Conley, Red Marshall, Bozo Snyder, Spike Hamilton and Dick Gabby Dana strive valiantly to fill his eminent footprints, and, if they don't exactly succeed, I can ask only—who could? All of them, however, are amiable and willing veterans, with no airs about them, and the Mr. Peanuts Mann is considerably more than that.

On the whole, the sketches shouldn't cause Mr. Todd to do much bragging about them, but at least two have their points. One consists of little more than the illustrious Peanuts pounding on a drum, but, since Mr. Mann proves himself a comedian of mettle, he makes it wonderfully funny. In another, there is a kind of rough-and-ready parody of "The Cocktail Party," which is transformed into good, sound burlesque by liberal use of paper hangers' paste and seltzer bottles. I also admired the assembled comics when they sang a sensible song by Harold Rome about how they would rather have a million dollars than a pocketful of dreams.

The Music

The music, now that I have got around to the subject, is not among the brightest virtues of "Peep Show," even though the songs have been contributed by various notable composers ranging from Jule Styne, who wrote the score for "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," to His Majesty, the King of Siam. Mr. Styne's contribution, "Stay With the Happy People," is one of the better numbers, but, as for the Oriental potentate's "Blue Night," on the basis of it I would not advise him to give up his throne in Bangkok to try for a career in Tin Pan Alley.

Among the decided virtues of the evening, there is a fine juggling team called the Peiro Brothers. It may be hard for you to credit, but they really have an original act, and a very entertaining one. Then there is a number in which Mr. Todd switches things a bit by dressing up his showgirls and introducing a couple of somewhat undressed men. Somehow I prefer his first idea. Prominently present are Lina Romay, who is pictorially commendable but not exactly overwhelming, and Lilly Christine, "the cat girl," who didn't altogether overwhelm me, either. But "Michael Todd's Peep Show" is strong on beauty and somewhat less strong on hilarity.

Journal American
June 29, 1950

Low Gags, High Gals And Middling Scenes

By ROBERT GARLAND

Beautiful, bounteous, bawdy, Michael Todd's "Peep Show" is at the Winter Garden. With high dames, low comics and middling scenes directed by (quote) Mister Robert Edwin Clark, Esquire (unquote), it is an entertainment to keep the untired business man untired. It will not even make him think!

Its high dames are the dames the boys sing about; girly, womanly, female, feminine dames. Hand-picked by the master of the revels, they are beautiful girls straight from the untired business man's imagination. They can speak when required. Sometimes they can sing in small distant voices.

In costumes fashioned after the costume of Gunga Din, they can also move slowly and sexuously about the stage. They assure the untired business man that "the model has not changed"; they reassure him that they "have what it takes." They think well of themselves, these comely undressed ladies. They should!

For they are the mainstay of Michael Todd's pitched-up burlesque show, the bonne bouche, the piece de resistance, the kickshaw, the sweatmeat, the tidbit. Whenever there is little else to do, "Peep Show" brings on the girls. They, in turn, in earnest and in numbers, give out generously with gender...

On Broadway, too, there is nothing like a dame. A high one, especially!

* * *

Real Lowdown

It takes a low comic to offset a high dame at the Winter Garden. Low comics are presently provided. Known to programmakers as "Les Farceurs," the low comics are Thomas Snyder, Hi Wilberforce Conley, Richard Dana John Mann, Benjamin Hamilton and a Mr. Marshall known, hirsutely speaking, as Red.

These, graduates of burlesque, circus, vaudeville, carnivals and blackface, act some sketches provided by William Wells, Robert Edwin Clark, Harry Irving Phillips, William Roos and an unnamed nostalgic from the good old days before Fiorello LaGuardia drove them and their shows over-river to New Jersey.

But they are at their lowest, their most comic, when clowning freely on their own. When, for instance, Hi Wilberforce Conley has it out with his deadpan missus and the classic paper-hanging number becomes pastely entangled with Thomas Sterns Eliot's "The Cocktail Party." Or what is now left of it!

As an exception, Harold Rome provides them with their most worthy new material. They, the Mr. Marshall who is "Red," the Mr. Mann who is "Peanuts," the Mr. Snyder who is "Bozo" and the Mr. Conley who is "Hi Wilberforce," are themselves during "A Pocketful of Dreams." Sweet and lowdown, this number...

And elegantly inelegant in projection, like Beatrice Lillie being grand!

* * *

The rest, taking it as it comes, divides itself between beauty, bounty and bawdy. "You Have Never Been Loved," sung by Lina Romay and juggled by the Peiro Brothers, is double-entendre. You, along with me, may have difficulty in finding the cleaner of the meanings. Those Senores Peiros are wizards.

"Friendly Neighbors" does not get better as it goes along. "The Shades of Night" is stunning. "Desire" features Lilly Christine the Cat Girl, to music by Raymond Scott and movements of her own. Clifford Guest, a visiting ventriloquist, has a block of a boy called Lester. He throws a mean voice. And English.

"Midway" ends in a bypath. "Ballet Burlesque" lives down to its title. "I Hate a Parade" follows the horses. "Blue Light" is the first act final to music by the King of Thailand. Were I a Thailander, His Majesty would write a better tune or get off the throne. "Stay with the Happy People" is——

So it goes, with girls, gags and glitter leading to a bubble-bath in which all waste is washed away and nothing but the bounty of Michael Todd, the beauty of the high girls and the bawdy of the low-comedians remain. Last evening a large luxuriant first audience took "Peep Show" in its stride...

It—bounteous, beautiful and bawdy—now belongs to the untired business man!

"Julius Caesar"

DAILY NEWS

June 21, 1950

'Julius Caesar' Given a Rousing Good Performance at the Arena

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The Arena, New York's first theatre-in-the-round since the Minskys had their runway at the Republic, has followed its first offering, the light and amusing "The Show-Off," with a rousing performance of Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar." It is, of course, a great and grand melodrama and it is stirringly played—and it is a fine demonstration of the adaptability of a small, square stage.

At last evening's first playing in this converted ballroom of the Hotel Edison on 47th St., Joseph Holland was most impressive in the role of Brutus. Mr. Holland is no stranger to unique stagings of this play, for it was he—on account of his remarkable resemblance to the late Mussolini—who played Caesar in Orson Welles' modern-dress production in 1937.

A Good Cast.

Also in the grand Shakespearean style was Basil Rathbone as the cunning Cassius, and very adroit was Alfred Ryder as the clever and rabble-rousing Antony. With Berry Kroeger as Casca, Sarah Burton as Calpurnia and Horace Braham as a fine Caesar, the company maintains a high professional level.

Under Dan Levin's direction, "Julius Caesar" moves at a good clip, but does not seem unnecessarily hurried. Since there are no sets to shift, nor even curtains to draw, the scenes change almost instantaneously. And the stage is expanded artfully by spotting members of the Roman mob in the audience and on the balconies, so that, in effect, the entire audience becomes the Roman mob. It is quite chummy.

New Stage Problem.

In fact, theatre-in-the-lap is so chummy that it brings up a bit of a problem. Under the great stress of some of the Bard's heaviest emotions, actors are apt to do quite a bit of—well, uh—spraying. It would seem that the works of the greatest of all dramatists—indeed, of all dramatists—have been written with one too many letters in the alphabet.

If drama-at-your-shinbones had been properly considered, William Shakesceare would have written such works as "Antony and Cleoatra" and "The Temest." Helen Hayes would have starred in "Ollyanna," Katharine Cornell would have been in "The Barretts of Wimole Street" and Humphrey Bogart would have won fame in "The Etrified Forest." And the history of the theatre would sarkle with the names of Brock Emberton, J. B. Riestley, Molly Icon and ZaSu Itts. And this notice would be by John Chaman.

"JULIUS CAESAR"

Play by William Shakespeare; staged by Dan Levin; settings by Ralph Alswang; costumes by Beulah Frankel; incidental music and songs by Hall Overton; presented by David Heilweil and Derrick Lynn-Thomas at the Arena in the Hotel Edison, June 20, 1950. The cast:

Cassius.....Basil Rathbone
Metellus Cimber..Winston Ross
Artemidorus.....Alan Dreeben
Pindarus.....Richard Wilder
Messala.....Milton Selzer
Julius Caesar..Horace Braham
Calpurnia.....Sarah Burton
Antony.....Alfred Ryder
Casca.....Berry Kroeger
Brutus.....Joseph Holland
Cinna, The Conspirator....
Herbert Ratner
Lucius.....Martin Newman
Decius.....Tony Dowling
Trebonius....John Glendinning
Portia.....Emily Lawrence
Servant to Antony.....
Charles Vocalis
Cinna, The Poet.....
Howard Wendell
Octavius.....Kurt Richards

Journal American

June 21, 1950

Rathbone in the Most Exciting Play in Town

By ROBERT GARLAND

You will never, I dare say, see a more exciting reproduction of William Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" than the exciting reproduction in the Arena at the Hotel Edison. You come out into W. 47th Street as taut and edgy as if you had actually taken part in one of the world's immortal plottings.

As a matter of imaginative report, you have. This, you must believe me, is what the theatre-in-the-round is for.

Apart from the novelty of its method of projection, the "Julius Caesar" in the Arena at the Hotel Edison is obviously the worthiest you are likely to have seen. Without exception, each member of its cast reads his familiar lines with feeling, clarity, respect and understanding.

Here is an all-over performance of William Shakespeare without fears. The playwright might just as well be T. S. Eliot.

Not since 1937, when a then promising young actor named Orson Welles was Brutus to the Caesar of Joseph Holland (Mr. Holland is now Brutus in the Arena), the Antony of George Coulouris and the Cassius of Martin Gabel, has the Elizabethian dramatist been so much alive.

Thanks to the Arena's "Julius Caesar", William Shakespeare is, in this one man's opinion, today's greatest playwright.

Play's the Thing

The players at the Hotel Edison, under Dan Levin's fresh and assured guidance, approach "Julius Caesar" as the heady psychological melodrama it is. They respect it, as every intelligent theatrician must. But they are also in awe of neither its greatness nor its grandeur.

As for its astonishing modern politico-social implications, these remain safely between you and William Shakespeare.

By which I am trying to point out that, to the directorial Mr. Levin, the play, not the parallel, is the thing. Caesar struts, Cassius plots, and the Roman populace carries on without indulging in a single projected thought into the worried world of 1950 A. D.

All this side of "Julius Caesar", in prose rather than verse, is findable almost word for word in the North translation of the Plutarch "Lives".

Yet William Shakespeare gives it point and progress, taking it out of life's, as well as Plutarch's, prosy hands and molding it into the artist's more metrical and orderly progression. In the Arena, the Caesar-Cassius affair happens as it should have happened had not nature put it on . . .

It is also the way Basil Rathbone and his featured and unfeatured fellows project it with Dan Levin saying "Why" and "How" and "When"!

Lean Cassius

So seamlessly welded in the collective performance of William Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" that I hesitate to name one performer before another. Yet, with Basil Rathbone as its star, I must not put off reporting that his Cassius has, and properly, a lean and hungry look.

You would say, along with Julius Caesar, that he thinks too much, adding, on your own, that Caesar has good reason to be afraid of him.

The Brutus of Joseph Holland is, basically, the philosopher of the playwright's lines, while, superficially, he rises to heights of humanized emotion. Writing of "heights of humanized emotion," listen to Alfred Ryder's superb underplaying of Antony.

As Julius Caesar, even to his profile, Horace Braham seems to the position born. Berry Kroeger's Casca is, I think, most rightfully two-toned.

The ladies, Emily Lawrence as Brutus' Portia and Sarah Burton as Caesar's Calpurnia, are lovely local color. The "planted" performers out in the senate with the audience are frightening in their turmoil and their timing. Honestly, there is no actually bad acting Roman.

Forgetting none of the other Broadway offerings, William Shakspeare's Julius Caesar", in the Arena at the Hotel Edison, is the most exciting play in town.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

June 21, 1950

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Audible But Dreary

THE second venture of the Arena Theater in the Hotel Edison is disappointing. One might very well have expected that the eloquence, occasional hub-hub and historical discussion of one of William Shakespeare's worst and most quoted plays would have come through with great insistency in the revival of "the-theater-in-the-round." Unfortunately, "Julius Caesar" has not been fitted to a pattern of production which makes it a production to be cherished. Some years ago Orson Welles cut the Shakespearian work down to its proper contours and made it vastly exciting. There is a great lack of excitement in the Arena offering.

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For one thing, the adaptation holds to the original so closely that one is asked to watch principals do whirligigs as they try to face four sides of an enclosing audience at once. For another, soliloquies are drawn out to a breaking point. There is a simple way to solve this particular problem, by putting a turntable in the center of the stage, but it would not solve the defects of this new "Julius Caesar." Since the players, headed by Basil Rathbone, have very slight conviction, there is no way of getting over an awkward situation which should have been a natural.

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Rathbone is at his best as Cassius, who plots Caesar's destruction on the Ides of March (did you pay your income tax?), and has his bondsman kill him for a shameful assassination. His nasal British accent is never obtrusive, even when he is talking at your elbow, as he frequently does. Horace Braham is far less effective as Julius Caesar, but he is fortunately made a corpse after two of three rather dreary acts. The performer who takes the brunt of this ring around the rosy show is Joseph Holland. His Brutus is a somewhat forensic for an arena offering, but he conducts himself with style and force.

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Dan Levin has directed the piece in the bewildered manner that has represented most one-ring circuses on the stage in the past. He brings his characters on from four different aisles, making an aisle-sitter wonder whether his head is being cut off as they emerge. Alfred Ryder is an adequate Antony, grieving over the corpse of a man he respected, and Berry Kroeger is properly slimy as Casca. It is not a good production, in an arena theater or out of it. The best that can be said for this "Julius Caesar" is that you can hear all the bad and good lines of a second-rate Shakespearian classic.

The New York Times

June 21, 1950

Basil Rathbone as Cassius in Shakespeare's 'Julius Caesar,' Staged at The Arena

By BROOKS ATKINSON.

Skip the first half of "Julius Caesar", and the new production that opened at The Arena last evening becomes more worthwhile. For the first half of the tragedy involves more plot, narrative and characters than Dan Levin can handle in the cramped space of an unfrocked hotel ballroom.

But as soon as Shakespeare has got the preliminary work out of the way, "Julius Caesar" is compact enough for a tiny arena stage; and the new production has the actors who can draw some of the fire out of it. Basil Rathbone, the star and an admirable actor, plays Cassius, which, no matter how you look at it, is a secondary role.

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Mr. Rathbone gives the part a mettlesome performance. It is lean and pithy, flashing with quick intelligence, and it is beautifully spoken. Mr. Rathbone has mastered the lines: they are brilliantly written by the king of our language, and Mr. Rathbone gives them the vitality of living speech. The quarrel scene between Brutus and Cassius is in the most fiery tradition of Shakespearean drama as Mr. Rathbone and Joseph Holland play it.

But the mightiest scenes in "Julius Caesar" belong to Brutus and Antony. The fumbling first sections of this production can be forgiven because the most stirring scenes have been directed so imaginatively. When Brutus and Antony address the Roman citizens after Caesar's murder, Mr. Levin has stationed actors in various parts of the audience to speak the lines written for the mob. There could hardly be a more vivid or logical way to stage one of the most exciting scenes in Shakespeare. Mr. Holland as Brutus and Alfred Ryder as Antony pitch into the scene like troupers and bring the theatrical bombast out of it.

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There are a number of dynamic scenes in the course of the evening. But the production misses much that is memorable in one of Shakespeare's mightiest dramas, and that is a pity. Even a highly educated schoolboy would have trouble in finding out the meaning of the first part of the play—the origin of the conspiracy, the unearthliness of the night before the Ides of March, the counterpoint development of the scene with Portia.

Indeed, the delicate embroideries of Shakespeare's workmanship are lost amid the whirl of the big scenes. Perhaps Mr. Levin has not mastered the techniques of arena staging. Or perhaps the playing area is too small for so big a play that needs space for declamation and room for a great many characters.

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Read the text before you visit this production. Since "Julius Caesar" is one of the supreme works of literature in English, this should not be a chore; and it will have the practical advantage of explaining what Shakespeare was up to. He was analyzing the doctrine that the ends justify the means, which is especially pertinent to life in the twentieth century. The Arena production gives you very little of that. By way of compensation, it gives you an especially fine actor in Mr. Rathbone and several rousing scenes full of some of the noblest speeches ever written for the stage.

N. B.—In an article, published June 11, about the historical background of arena theatre in America, this wayward department ignored the pioneer work done by Gilmor Brown of the virtuoso Pasadena Playhouse. Mr. Brown inaugurated arena staging in his Playbox on Oct. 29, 1924, having been inspired by the flexible staging of Jacques Copeau and his Vieux Colombier. Apparently Mr. Brown is the grand-daddy of arena staging in this country. His Playbox is still in use as one department of the Pasadena Playhouse.

Daily Mirror

June 21, 1950

'Julius Caesar' at Arena Is Great Entertainment

By ROBERT COLEMAN

What an age was the Elizabethan in England! It was an age in which "Sir" before your name meant more than "Lord" or "Duke." Because the "Sirs" were discovering new continents, protecting and establishing a great empire. Good Queen Elizabeth rightly admired and loved her Knights. She also had affection for the gentry.

Among the gentry was a chap named William Shakespeare. Yes, he finally won a coat-of-arms for his family, so his biographers tell us. And never was a coat-of-arms better bestowed upon a gentleman. What Raleigh and Drake did to expand and defend the physical facets of the empire, Shakespeare did to enlarge and glorify its intellectual horizons.

Last evening David Heilweil and Derrick Lynn-Thomas presented a thrilling revival of Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" at the Arena in the Edison Hotel. This revival brought home to us again that "Julius Caesar" is one of the Bard's greatest plays. It is superb melodrama. It is packed with some of the most eloquent of Shakespearean speeches. It contains an amazing number of memorable and trenchant quotations.

If Sophocles' "Oedipus Rex" is the greatest whodunit we have ever seen, then, certainly, Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" is the greatest courtroom drama we've ever covered.

If you want to know who won this duel of wits, fought in a Roman Forum and on a battlefield at Philippi, then rush to the Arena for tickets. As you know, it's against the rules for a critic to reveal the denouement of an exciting melodrama.

Basil Rathbone is starred as Cassius. He is an excellent Cassius. And he is a modest star, in permitting Alfred Ryder, as Antony, and Joseph Holland, as Brutus, to eclipse him with their superlative renditions of the finest and most effective moments of the play.

Berry Kroeger, as Casca, is nothing less than wonderful.

By all means, see "Julius Caesar." See a great play.